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PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#)
SUBJECT: SYRIAN LEGAL EXPERTS, BUSINESSMEN TO LAUNCH
TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL BRANCH

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4(b)/(d)
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¶1. (C) A group of businessmen, lawyers, judges, and researchers are in the final planning stages of launching a Syrian chapter of Transparency International, the Germany-based anti-corruption NGO. According to activist and researcher Radwan Zyadeh, the organization has been in the works for the last six months and will include twelve founding members. Independent economist and business consultant Nabil Sukkar, whom Zyadeh identified as the future vice-president of the new TI chapter, told EconChief in a separate conversation that after three months of debate on structure and bylaws of the organization, the group was ready to submit its license request to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. Sukkar commented that the founding members were divided on what the SARG reaction would be but had made the decision to begin operations within two weeks of their filing-- as allowed under Syrian law. Sukkar shared that much time had been spent debating whether to research specific cases of alleged corruption by government officials, or to concentrate on raising Syrian awareness about the importance of transparency. In the end, awareness raising won out as a less controversial option, less likely to draw SARG ire.

¶2. (C) Zyadeh added that the organization has already been in contact with Transparency International chapters in Morocco, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon. Sukkar mentioned that the organization will not initially seek an official partnership with TI for fear of SARG retribution, but has chosen a name that will reflect a clear connection.

¶3. (C) According to Zyadeh, membership will, for now, not include opposition organizations, as the chapter's members want to guarantee the group's "professionalism" and reduce its exposure to politicization. Sukkar mentioned that a "leftist" organization had also been attempting to launch a similar organization, but that they have been unable to create the infrastructure to do it.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The Transparency International chapter is a further indicator of the rise of corruption as an appealing reform issue among the broader Syrian civil society, echoing sentiments made earlier in the year by opposition politicians Riad Seif and Samir Nashar. At the same time, the commitment to limiting membership underlines the divide between reform-minded businessmen and the full-time opposition, as the businessmen remain skeptical of the latter's ability to implement plans and avoid political bickering.

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